

Developing Professional Logisticians  
EWS Contemporary Issue Paper  
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To  
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The success of the Corps, now and in the future, depends on Marines of the highest caliber who are prepared to increase their knowledge and skills through lifelong training and education.

--General M. W. Hagee (Ret), USMC

The Marine Corps does not develop professional logisticians. At best, it trains personnel in the basic techniques of the special skill sets within their assigned military occupational specialty (MOS). Logisticians stagnate due to a lack of emphasis on professional development from leadership and a training and education system lacking the flexibility to meet the demands of a high operational tempo and the basic need for continuing education. The Marine Corps must implement new teaching methods such as mobile training teams, historical vignettes, tactical decision games, and a reading program in order to cultivate a professional and adaptive corps of logisticians.

### **Background**

Addressing change would be unnecessary if the status quo was sufficient, but unit inspections indicate a significant failure in the current system.<sup>1</sup> Inspections results from 2004 to 2007 were significantly lower than the average from the previous years.<sup>2</sup> Many factors including operational tempo and personnel rotations contributed to the poor results, but the most troubling trend was a lack of experienced junior Marines, non-

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<sup>1</sup> Infantry divisions are staffed with an inspection team in the logistics section or G-4. The inspection team from 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division is known as the Logistics Readiness Team (LRT). The LRT inspects most, if not all, functions of supply, maintenance management, motor transport, ordnance, field mess, and health services. The author served as the LRT OIC from November 2004 to May 2007.

<sup>2</sup> "Logistics Readiness Inspection Trends" maintained by the LRT OIC. During FY 2005-2006, 50% or 8 of 16 units failed, and during FY 1999-2002, 17% or 10 of 58 units failed.

commissioned officers (NCOs), and junior commissioned officers. Furthermore, inspection results identified unit MOS training as poor and unit training programs as weak, if not completely absent.

Compounding the issue of inexperienced junior ranks is the high operational tempo. Most battalion sized units conduct a six month the Pre-Deployment Training Program (PTP), followed by a seven month deployment.<sup>3</sup> Although unit training and deployment cycles can range from 12 to 18 months, the time devoted to PTP and subsequent deployment makes effective professional education development and implementation very difficult. The ideas presented in this paper are aimed at providing a solution to balance the need for continued professional development within a time constrained environment.

### **Technical Skills**

All professionals must start with a foundation of technical skills. The Marine Corps promulgates basic logistics skills at entry level training conducted at Marine Corps Combat Service Support Schools (MCCSSS) along with follow-on training for the advanced skills needed by NCOs and Staff Non-Commissioned Officers (SNCOs).<sup>4</sup> Currently, MCCSSS has no advanced training

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<sup>3</sup> CMC, "OIF/OEF Pre-Deployment Training Continuum" (221458Z Oct 05).

<sup>4</sup> Marine Corps Combat Service Support Schools, "Welcome Aboard" (<http://www.lejeune.usmc.mil/mccsss/welcome/files/welcome.pdf>, accessed 14 February 2008), pp. 3-10.

opportunities available for officers.<sup>5</sup> However, additional training and education opportunities are available for SNCOs and officers from the School of MAGTF<sup>6</sup> Logistics (SOML).<sup>7</sup> Although MCCSSS and SOML are great opportunities for professional growth, they require students to spend significant time away from their units, a requirement that makes most commands reluctant to send them.

### **Mobile Training Teams**

Since the reality of the current operational tempo is unlikely to change, an obvious option is to look at changing the training method. If operations prevent students from attending schools, bringing the schools to them provides a possible solution. In the winter of 2006, 1<sup>st</sup> Marine Division requested that the MCCSSS conduct the Enlisted Supply Intermediate Course (ESIC) and Ground Supply Chiefs Course (GSCC) at Camp Pendleton, California via mobile training teams (MTTs) to minimize the amount of time the Marines were away from their units. These courses were conducted Monday through Saturday with all unnecessary events, including physical training, eliminated. These measures coupled with little to no travel time shortened the courses from 30 to 20 training days, or the equivalent of two work weeks.

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<sup>5</sup> MCCSSS, "Welcome Aboard", pp. 3-10.

<sup>6</sup> Marine Air Ground Task Force

<sup>7</sup> CMC, MarAdmin 455-07, "FY08 Marine Corps Logistics Education Opportunities" (301938Z JUL 07).

The Camp Pendleton MTT evolution was a marked success graduating 66 students in 20 days. The courses conducted at Camp Pendleton were the largest MCCSSS had conducted since 2001.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the MCCSSS faculty was able to ensure that all requirements for course certification were met despite the course length being altered. Finally, the travel and lodging costs were cut significantly since only 13 personnel had to travel to Camp Pendleton, California instead of 66 personnel traveling to Camp Johnson, North Carolina.<sup>9</sup> The success at Camp Pendleton has set the stage for future MTTs from the other courses within MCCSSS and SOML.

### **Conceptual Skills**

Training teams are a good way to promulgate the technical skills that are taught in formal schools and courses, but logisticians need to study their craft from a conceptual perspective as well. The Case Study Method is a largely untapped educational medium for logisticians.<sup>10</sup> This method is widely used in graduate level education, most notably at the Harvard Business School where the method was pioneered.<sup>11</sup> "The case method creates a classroom in which students succeed not by simply absorbing facts and theories, but also by *exercising* the

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<sup>8</sup> Speaker notes for the GSCC and ESIC graduation at Camp Pendleton on 3 Nov 2006.

<sup>9</sup> Four instructors from MCCSSS traveled from Camp Johnson, North Carolina and nine students traveled from 29 Palms, California.

<sup>10</sup> Bruce Gudmundsson, conversation with the author, 14 February 2008.

<sup>11</sup> Harvard Business School, "The Case Method" (<http://www.hbs.edu/case/>, accessed 14 February 2008).

skills of leadership and teamwork in the face of real problems."<sup>12</sup> These types of exercises will challenge Marines to think critically and enhance their creativity and adaptability. Two forms of case study are already used to some degree in the Marine Corps. These cases are analysis and dilemma.<sup>13</sup>

### **Historical Vignettes**

The first case study type is the analysis. Case studies of this category outline a scenario to include the background, problem, and actions taken.<sup>14</sup> The teacher then guides the students in a discussion of the scenario to illustrate the desired lessons. History makes an excellent source for these types of studies. Historical vignettes are frequently used to educate personnel on tactics and leadership, but little else. Fortunately for logisticians, as long as warfare has existed, so has the need to sustain and maintain the force. Gallipoli, Guadalcanal, and the Shenandoah Campaign are just a few historical examples that have significant lessons regarding logistics.<sup>15</sup> The well of historical vignette sources is virtually bottomless. Logistics lessons can be gleaned from

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<sup>12</sup> Harvard Business School, "The Case Method"

<sup>13</sup> University of Missouri. "Teaching with the Case Study Method" (<http://etatmo.missouri.edu/toolbox/doonline/webcase.htm>, accessed 14 February 2008).

<sup>14</sup> University of Missouri. "Teaching with the Case Study Method."

<sup>15</sup> To get familiar with these examples, refer to *Gallipoli* by Alan Moorehead (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1956), *No Bended Knee: The Battle for Guadalcanal* by Merrill Twining (New York: The Random House Publishing Group, 1996), and "The Shenandoah Campaign: Logistics as the Objective" by Burton Wright III (*Army Logistician* 33, no. 2 (2001): 42). Burton Wright's article is a synopsis of the importance of logistics for the campaign, while the other two books cover all aspects of the respective battles.



studying the feats of Alexander the Great or from current operations in Iraq or Afghanistan.

### **Tactical Decision Games**

Historical vignettes can also be studied using the second form of case; the dilemma. This type of case involves an open ended problem for which the students must develop their own conclusion. Historical vignettes can be used anonymously and without the actual resolution. After initial discussions, students are informed of the real situation's identity and can analyze their resolution in comparison or contrast to the actual decisions and actions. However, this type of case can be equally successful using fictional, open-ended scenarios. The Marine Corps uses these frequently, but calls them tactical decision games (TDGs).

The combat arms community uses TDGs frequently and has called on TECOM to develop TDGs for their junior leaders to include squad and fire team leaders.<sup>16</sup> MCCSSS has already embraced this method through the development of the Tactical Decision Center (TDC), which is a facility at MCCSSS where students can exercise Combat Logistics Operations Center (CLOC) operations with the latest bridging technologies.<sup>17</sup> However, the

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Jones, "Ground Combat Element Operations and Training -Setting Conditions for Success" (Quantico, Virginia: Marine Corps Center for Lessons Learned, 2007).

<sup>17</sup> John D. Lathers, "Tactical Decision Center Information Paper" (Camp Johnson, North Carolina: Marine Corps Combat Service Support School, 2007, [http://www.lejeune.usmc.mil/mccsss/Files/TDC%20Info%20Paper%20\(v4\).doc](http://www.lejeune.usmc.mil/mccsss/Files/TDC%20Info%20Paper%20(v4).doc), accessed 5 December 2007).

TDC requires personnel to be sent to MCCSSS. In lieu of high tech computer based games, TDGs can be simple, scripted problems that are openly discussed by groups to elicit critical thought and expose different points of view. Beyond tactics and leadership, TDGs are an excellent way to challenge logisticians to think critically about their profession.

### **Structured Reading Program**

In addition to case studies, structured reading programs are another great way to develop personnel to think more critically as well as to expose them to new ideas. In fact, reading is an excellent way to build the requisite knowledge to make case studies more valuable and effective. The Marine Corps University (MCU) runs the Professional Reading Program which has been well publicized by recent articles in the *Marine Corps Gazette* and *Leatherneck Magazine*.<sup>18</sup> This program is an excellent foundation on which to build a logistics based reading program. Currently, the Professional Reading Program focuses on leadership, tactical skills, and current operating environment issues with little attention paid to logistics specific topics. Creating a list of books and developing discussion guides would be a valuable tool for leaders to begin a continuing education program. Appendix A is an initial book list for consideration.

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<sup>18</sup> S. D. Griffin, "Read a Book, Get Ahead" (*Leatherneck* 90, no. 12, Dec, 2007: 42, <http://proquest.umi.com/pqdweb?did=1390054251&Fmt=7&clientId=65345&RQT=309&VName=PQD>, accessed 5 December 2007).

## Leadership

The key component of these training and education methods is leadership. These programs cannot succeed without aggressive resolve. In fact, this responsibility is specified in *MCDP-1*:

Commanders are expected to conduct a continuing professional education program for their subordinates that includes developing military judgment and decisionmaking and teaches general professional subjects and specific technical subjects pertinent to occupational specialties.<sup>19</sup>

Commanders are perfectly situated to identify the areas in which their subordinates need to be trained and educated.

Unfortunately, the majority of leaders probably have little to no experience developing and implementing a training and education program.

Therefore, leaders must explore available resources to build this knowledge. Fortunately, several resources are available to learn about case study methodology. A useful and concise starting point is Winston Tellis' article "Introduction to Case Study."<sup>20</sup> This article summarizes the case study's key aspects and provides a comprehensive resources list for further research. A good starting point for developing a reading program is to copy the model already established by the Marine Corps' Professional Reading Program. The reality is that

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<sup>19</sup> USMC. *MCDP 1 - Warfighting*, page 3.

<sup>20</sup> Winston Tellis, "Application of a Case Study Methodology" (*The Qualitative Report* 3, no. 3 (September, 1997), <http://www.nova.edu/ssss/QR/QR3-3/tellis2.html>, accessed 14 February 2008).

commanders cannot wait for another command, organization, or individual to develop these programs for them. The Marine Corps expects leaders to have a bias for action. Leaders can fulfill that expectation and the mandate of *MCDP 1* by heeding the recommendations outline above.

### **Counterarguments**

As leaders digest the information provided in this paper, they will likely, and astutely, realize the amount of time and effort that will be required to implement these programs. Consequently, they will naturally identify reasons why these programs are not necessary, but the value and necessity of these methods cannot be rationalized away.

Most critics will argue that training occurs through daily on the job training (OJT). *MCDP 4* identifies this fact quite frankly: "Unlike certain functions which are conducted only in war, logistics is always 'on.'" <sup>21</sup> However, Major John Sattely in his article "Training Logisticians for Tomorrow's Battlefield" points out that while the logisticians of a unit participate in training, they are primarily involved to support the training rather than to benefit from it. <sup>22</sup> No commander would overtly neglect the training of the support personnel, but the emphasis is on the primary personnel, such as the infantrymen in an

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<sup>21</sup> USMC. *MCDP 4 - Logistics*, page 7.

<sup>22</sup> John S. Sattely, "Training Logisticians for Tomorrow's Battlefield" (Expeditionary Warfare School, Marine Corps University, Quantico, Virginia, 2004).

infantry unit. Senior leaders planning the exercise assume that logisticians receive the necessary professional training through supporting the exercises. This assumption is as erroneous as thinking a mechanic, store clerk, or truck driver from a stateside business can deploy and fulfill the same role in combat. The challenges faced in garrison and while deployed are extremely different in most cases, and OJT is insufficient to train for combat operations.

Other detractors will protest that combat related training and education must take precedence because that is what saves lives. Combat skills, especially for a deploying unit, are extremely important; however, poorly executed logistics functions can have deadly effects as well. Vehicle accidents resulting from poor procedures or mechanical defects, training mishaps due to improperly handled ammunition, and weapons malfunctions as a result of inadequate maintenance can all have dire consequences.

One of the biggest contradictions to the claim that training and education need improvement is the fact that readiness for deployed units is high. The Marine Corps Equipment Readiness Information Tool (MERIT) is an easy and accessible way to review the equipment posture of any Marine Corps unit. A check of deployed units shows a high readiness rate which would indicate the logisticians are doing a superb

job in the face of demanding operations. However, the seemingly limitless amount of money available and being spent to support deployed operations must be considered. Units made, and probably still make, a habit of ordering the same part multiple times if it did not arrive in a timely manner. Units deployed or training for deployment do not face the same budgetary constraints that curb wasteful spending in peace time. Additionally, all newly fielded and newly overhauled equipment is sent to support deployed units first. This greatly reduces the maintenance and supply requirements because the equipment arrives in excellent condition. Readers must note that this virtual logistics gluttony is not normal and a high level of readiness does not automatically prove that logistics operations are proper or efficient.

### **Conclusion**

Critics cannot deny that logisticians play a vital role in the Marine Corps. Every supported unit has a vested interest in the training and education of these Marines because these units are the ones ultimately affected. Unit commanders must be more proactive and aggressive in training and educating their logisticians. Given the obstacles of the current operational tempo and the dearth of dynamic learning programs, mobile training teams, historical vignettes, tactical decision games, and structured reading programs are all low tech and low cost

means to build a corps of adaptive and critically thinking  
logisticians to usher in the future.

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## Appendix A

Alexander the Great and the Logistics of the Macedonian Army by Donald Engels

Supplying War: Logistics from Wallenstein to Patton by Martin van Creveld

Feeding Mars: Logistics in Western Warfare from the Middle Ages to the Present by John A. Lynn

Operational Logistics: The Art and Science of Sustaining Military Operations by Moshe Kress

Milestones: Logistics in Military History by James R. Myers

Military Logistics: The Third Dimension by Parmodh Sarin and Brig. Parmodh Sarin

U.S. Military Logistics, 1607-1991: A Research Guide (Research Guides in Military Studies) by Charles R. Shrader

Communist Logistics in the Korean War: (Contributions in Military Studies) by Charles R. Shrader

Logistics in the National Defense (Naval War College / Logistics Leadership Series) by the George Washington Logistics Research Project and Henry Effingham Eccles

Moving Mountains: Lessons in Leadership and Logistics from the Gulf War by William Pagonis and Jeffrey Cruikshank

Pure Logistics: The Science of War Preparation by George Thorpe